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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the findings of a 1973 survey of research/information needs for promoting innovation in community colleges is presented. This survey was made of institutions which had previously expressed interest in information assistance. Analyses are made by topic area, region and topics by region. These tentative conclusions were reached: (1) a significant need exists for information at the institutional level; (2) the main criterion for usefulness of information seems to be its applicability; (3) because of (2), simple distribution of research results would be ineffective; and (4) long-range national planning for determining research priorities is necessary. (KM)

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RESEARCH/INFORMATION NEEDS FOR PROGRAM INNOVATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

A report from the National Dissemination Project
for Post-Secondary Education

November, 1973

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State of Washington
State Board for Community
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UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

RESEARCH/INFORMATION NEEDS FOR PROGRAM INNOVATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1973, the National Dissemination Project for Post-Secondary Education completed a survey of research and information needs for promoting innovation in educational programs, for community colleges and similar post-secondary institutions throughout the United States.

This report analyses the findings of the survey, and offers some observations about the character and distribution of these needs.

In earlier surveys, the emphasis had been on identifying institutions which wanted information to assist them in transforming their programs and services. As a result of mass mailings and telephone calls, about 15% of all 2-year institutions in the nation expressed enough interest to request specific information prepared by the Project*. Given the fiscal and administrative problems facing higher education, and the uncertain climate for legislative and financial support, this degree of interest in specific forms of programmatic information must be considered very encouraging.

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* Further information on the earlier surveys is contained in "Status Report" July 31, 1973.

For the October 1973 survey, we chose to concentrate on those institutions which had previously expressed an active interest in information assistance, to determine what further kinds of help they would need. The smaller number subjected to in-depth polling is not, in the true sense, a "sample"; rather, they constitute that significant minority of 2-year institutions who are actively seeking ideas and information on ways to transform their institutions and programs. Clearly, their needs must have significantly greater priority for expeditors and agents of educational change; they are seeking the "frontiers" of innovation, by their own commitment to seek information for change.

Our hope is that the conclusions of this survey will be useful to Federal agencies whose interests lie in sponsoring or funding educational research, by providing a profile of U.S. 2-year institutions in terms of need for research assistance. Perhaps it may be possible, in the future, to conduct more such studies, through which the need of institutions for research/information resources can be systematically addressed, and long range plans to develop information for promoting innovation can be drawn up. The National Dissemination Project will be happy to assist in any such endeavors.

ANALYSIS: TOPIC AREAS

1. "CAREER EDUCATION" TOPICS ATTRACTED THE MOST NATIONAL INTEREST.

There was high nationwide interest in career-based diagnostic tools, long-range occupational forecasting, and pre-planning for Career Education through checklist (program audit) procedure. "Work Experience" also attracted high national attention.

Interest was also expressed in Job Development as a function. The only Career Education topic that failed to interest institutions was Program Reorganization; and, we found, the rejection was universal.

Our informal conclusion is that research results on instruments to assist the transformation of post-secondary education on "Career" lines is eagerly sought everywhere in the nation, provided they lead to tools which can be tried out in practice. However, there is some reluctance to seek ideas for major program re-structuring at this point; thus, ideas on course re-clustering, career ladders and lattices, curriculum revision, etc. are not likely to be eagerly sought. Perhaps the adoption of new diagnostic tools, and "peripheral" functions such as job development, will promote program re-structuring as a natural process; this may, in fact, be the appropriate procedure for encouraging Career Education through research.

2. IDEAS FOR PLANNING TECHNIQUES WERE EQUALLY POPULAR, BUT INTEREST IN DIFFERENT APPROACHES VARIED CONSIDERABLY BY REGION.

Long-range Planning was highly favored in the Northwest; Management-by-objectives/goals in the Southeast; Planned "AA to BA"

articulation in the Southeast and Southwest. Only one topic--Program Evaluation methods--was favored in more than two regions (Midwest, Northwest, Northeast). As a result, the "national" vote on any of these topic areas was lower than for Career Education; the "vote" by region on the indicated topics was, however, very strong.

We conclude that research and information on planning methods is very important to two-year colleges, but regional differences call for emphasizing different aspects by region. Presumably, this suggests that "planning research" should be regionalized to cope with these differences of need.

Again, we find the emphasis to be on usable instruments, rather than case-studies or examples; demonstration models for planning were uniformly rejected. This continues the pattern established for Career Education.

3. OF "MISCELLANEOUS" TOPICS, IDEAS FOR DEALING WITH STUDENT ATTRITION AND FOR IDENTIFYING NEW LEARNERS DREW THE GREATEST NATIONAL INTEREST. A RELATED TOPIC, THE DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT DEMAND FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, WAS NEXT IN NATIONAL POPULARITY.

2-year colleges are especially concerned with identifying and solving drop-out (attrition) problems; this topic drew the highest "vote" of all individual topics in our survey. The need to define and estimate the student demand for educational services, and the problem of identifying and serving new categories of students, are also emphasized. These concerns are

familiar to educators who have been examining the enrollment problem in higher education; our survey indicates that they are nationwide concerns.

4. IDEAS DEALING WITH EXCEPTIONALLY "DIFFICULT" EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS (e.g. PRISON REFORM, OR URBAN EDUCATION) DREW LITTLE INTEREST, NATIONALLY OR REGIONALLY.

Those topics which had a "specialized" impact drew practically no expression of interest in the survey. The degree of lack of interest was far greater than we expected, and led us to speculate that even "activist" institutions may be turning away from such issues. Perhaps this is related to federal fund cutbacks, or perhaps institutions pursuing such goals no longer feel thay need "outside" information; it is difficult to say. A further survey, dealing with this question, is necessary to establish the extent of this phenomenon and possible reasons for it.

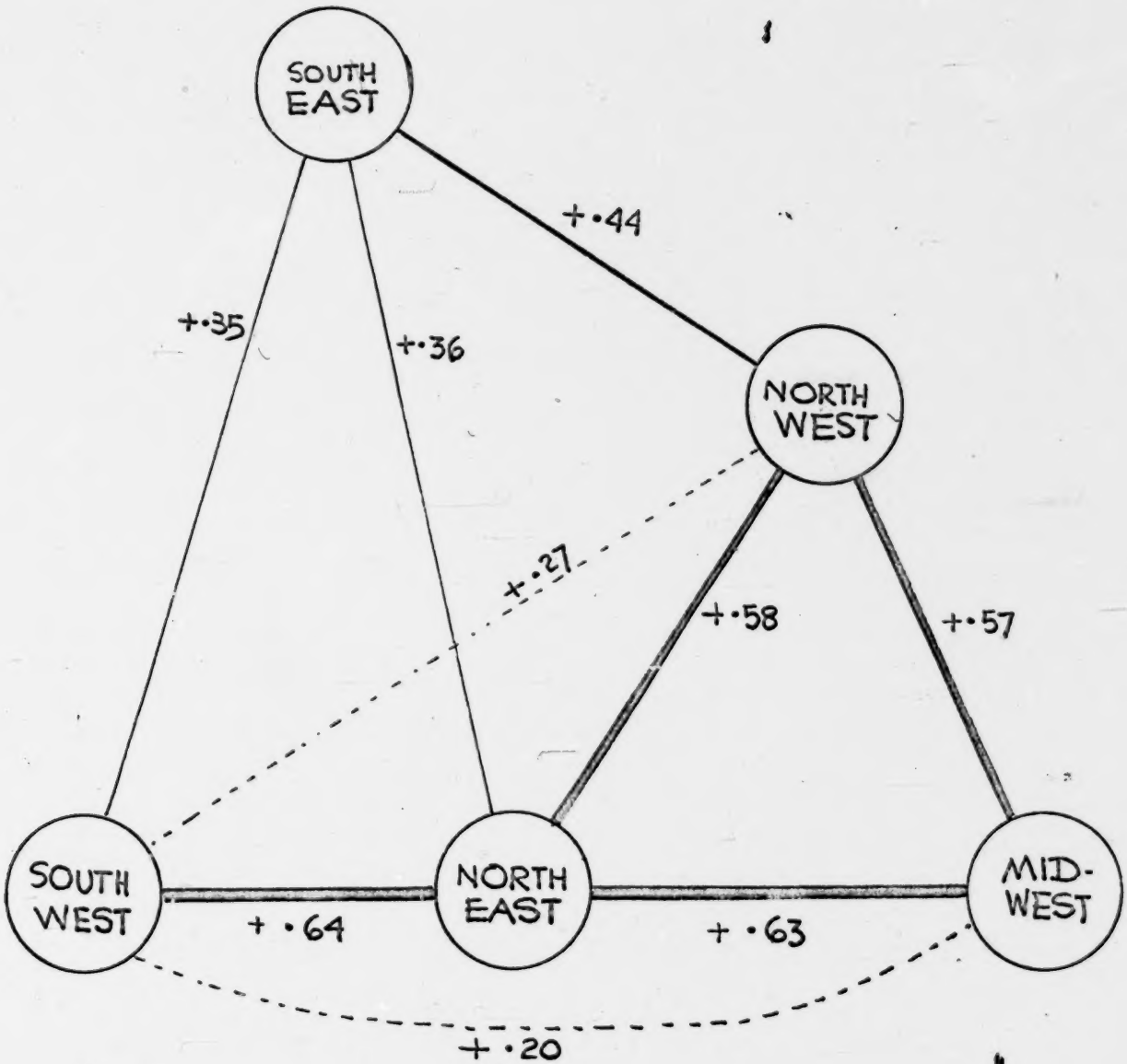

DIAGRAM I: A GRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF CORRELATIONS FOR RESEARCH/INFORMATION NEEDS OF 2-YEAR COLLEGES by REGION

ANALYSIS: BY REGION

In order to analyse the differences between regions of the United States in their expression of information needs, the following "regions" were defined:

Midwest Region: Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Ohio, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

Southeast Region: Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Northwest Region: Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming.

Northeast Region: Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Southwest Region: Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The distinctions made between "regions" is somewhat arbitrary; the "boundaries" were based on maintaning approximately similar sample sizes between regions.

Correlating the percentages of expressed interest by topic, between different regions, provided an approximate measure of the similarity between different regions in their expressed interests.

Diagram I expresses the results in a graphical manner.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the diagram and related statistical analyses.

1. THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REGIONS IN THEIR INTERESTS FOR PROGRAM INFORMATION. THESE DIFFERENCES DO NOT ALWAYS FOLLOW GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS.

The Northeast and Southwest have quite similar information needs, even though they are on opposite corners of the U.S. The needs of the Northeast region correlate, on other grounds, with the Midwest; yet the Midwest is further "removed" from the Southwest, although geographically closer. Surprisingly, the "differences" between the Northwest and Southwest are far greater than between Northwest and Northeast, or even the Midwest. The Southeast is, as might be expected, most "distinctive" and idiosyncratic of all regions in its information needs. What is a little surprising is that it is "closest" to the Northwest, and "further apart" from the Midwest. These relative degrees of differences were not anticipated when the survey was planned.

2. THE GREATEST INTER-REGIONAL DIFFERENCES CAN BE FOUND IN THEIR APPROACHES TO PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IDEAS.

   See "Analysis: Topic Areas".

3. THE GREATEST INTER-REGIONAL SIMILARITIES OCCUR IN THEIR INTEREST IN CAREER EDUCATION.

   See "Analysis: Topic Areas".

4. THE NORTHEAST REGION'S INFORMATION NEEDS HAVE THE HIGHEST AVERAGE CORRELATION WITH NEEDS OF OTHER REGIONS. IT IS, THEREFORE, MORE NEARLY "REPRESENTATIVE" OF THE NATION'S RESEARCH/DATA NEEDS THAN ANY OTHER REGION. THE NORTHWEST REGION IS A CLOSE SECOND; ONLY THE DISSIMILARITIES BETWEEN NORTHWEST AND SOUTHWEST CAUSE IT TO FALL INTO SECOND PLACE.

This information can be easily derived from Diagram I. What is especially surprising is the "difference" between Southwest

and Northwest, which turns out to be greater than that between Southwest and Southeast. If the Southwest were to be excluded, the Northwest would edge out the Northeast as the "representative" region as far as programmatic information needs are concerned.

5. THERE IS GREATER INTER-REGIONAL AGREEMENT ON TOPICS WHERE THERE IS INSUFFICIENT INTEREST, THAN ON TOPICS WHERE THERE IS CONSIDERABLE INTEREST.

6. THE SOUTHEAST REGION IS THE AREA OF THE U.S. WITH THE MOST "DISTINCTIVE" AND "DIFFERENT" NEEDS FOR INNOVATIONAL INFORMATION.

This point was covered under a previous section, but is re-emphasized because of its importance. A "Southern Strategy" for a research plan to develop information according to its unique set of needs may well be a viable option.

ANALYSIS OF TOPICS BY REGION

Because of the general nature of our survey, conclusions about the differences between regions by their degrees of interest in topic subjects or areas must be considered preliminary, and tentative.

However, we found that the "similarity" between Southwest and Northeast Regions, and their "difference" from the Northwest, could be explained by (i) the greater interest in long-range forecasting and planning in the Northwest Region, compared to the other two; (ii) an interest in diagnostic tools and remedial education, which was common to both Southwest and Northeast but not shared to the same degree in the Northwest. We can speculate that interest in "macro-" problems are greater in the Northwest, where institutional systems are undergoing development; in the Southwest and Northeast, similarities of urban and high-population areas cause more attention to be devoted to individualized (i.e. diagnostic and remedial) problems.

The Northwest and Northeast, however, have common concerns in assessment and evaluation; they are different from the Southwest in being less interested in new learners and bilingual education. This perhaps underscores an "avant-garde" quality, which distinguishes the Southwest from the rest of the nation: the last two topics are in the "developmental" or "experimental" domain, unlike the areas which are common to the northern regions.

There are, however, no topics or subjects which are common to the West, yet different from the Northeast. We conclude that there are very real differences between Northwest and Southwest

as far as information needs in education are concerned; these differences are sufficiently great that coordination between them without relating to the needs and resources of the eastern regions may prove difficult if not impossible.

CONCLUSIONS

Because of the preliminary nature of this survey, the conclusions presented should be considered tentative.

1. There is a very significant need for "information" at the institutional level--information which can be used to solve, or experiment with solving, problems relating to programmatic innovation and institutional change.

2. However, the main criterion for "usefulness" of information would seem to be that it is applicable; i.e. provides ideas which can be tested to solve problems.

Examples, case-studies or "demonstration" reports have, at best, only a marginal value. What is really needed is useable instruments, tools, and methods, validated (where possible) by research.

3. Because of the emphasis on "applicability", simple distribution of research results would be an ineffective way of utilizing the information gained from research. The need for "educational engineers" to develop useable models from valid research results is very great, and should be considered part and parcel of any efforts at dissemination.

4. Long-range planning at the national level for determining research priorities is very necessary. Such planning should be based on the needs of institutions for technical assistance, both as a national basis as well as by region. This requires a continuing analysis of the needs of the most "innovative" institutions for information and technical assistance, so that policies setting directions for the funding of research activity are developed from a rational basis.

APPENDIX: PROFILE OF RESEARCH INFORMATION NEEDS FOR 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS, OCTOBER, 1973

Topics	REGIONAL INTEREST MW	SE	NW	NE	SW	NATIONAL INTEREST BY TOPIC		BY AREA
A. PLANNING								
A.1 Planning by Consortia methods.	▒					19%		
A.2 Setting goals, objectives, priorities.	▒	■	▒	▒	▒	44%	▒	
A.3 "Very Long-Range Planning" methods.		▒	■			31%		32±13%
A.4 Assessment and Evaluation methods.	■	▒	■	■		44%	▒	(.40 μ)
A.5 Planning: Demonstration models.	▒					15%		
A.6 Planning AA/BA articulation.		■	▒		■	37%	▒	
B. CAREER EDUCATION								
B.1 Career-based diagnostic tools.	▒	▒	▒	■	■	46%	■	
B.2 Career-based enrollment forecasting.		■	■	▒	▒	52%	■	47±4%
B.3 Job development methods in education.		■	▒	▒	▒	41%	▒	(.09 μ)
B.4 Checklist for Career Ed. planning.	■		■	■	■	50%	■	
B.5 Reorganizing programs for Career Ed.						44%		
C. ACADEMIC ISSUES								
C.1 Bilingual Education for Adults.					▒	20%		46±12%
C.2 Combining "Work Experience" with learning.	■	▒	■	■	■	65%	■	(.27 μ)
C.3 Remedial methods in academic programs.		■		■	■	46%	▒	
D. OTHER TOPICS								
D.1 Measuring the demand for Ed. Services.	■	■	■	▒		48%	■	
D.2 Specialized programs for penal institutions.						19%		43±16%
D.3 Recruiting: The problem of attrition.	■	▒	■	■	■	66%	■	(.36 μ)
D.4 Urban Education issues.						17%		
D.5 Defining and finding the "New Learners."	▒	▒	▒	▒	■	44%	▒	

KEY: ☐ low interest ▒ medium interest ■ high interest